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ABSTRACT

A holistic approach to planning the preretirement education of active duty noncommissioned officers was formulated on the basis of Sample and Kaufman's Organizational Elements Model. The approach stresses removing the responsibility for education and employment of veterans from the state and Federal level and placing it on the individual soldier. The model is divided into internal and external elements, which are in turn subdivided into organizational efforts and societal impact. Organizational efforts include inputs containing resources, physical facilities, existing needs, goals, and objectives. The processes include teaching, training, developing, and using the small-group approach. The outputs are certification, job entry, improvement skills, or licensure. Outcomes are current and future self-sufficiency, production, and improved quality of life. The proposed program is based on the assumption that the real responsibility for the transition into civilian life for the veteran must be placed on the individual and is designed to assist active duty soldiers by providing them with a plan of action to follow. (MN)

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Veterans' Education and Employment, A Holistic Programming Approach for the Active Duty Noncommissioned Officer

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Abstract

A holistic programming approach is used to discuss the problems of education and employment of the Armed Forces' veterans. A plan to initiate long range pre-retirement programming for career noncommissioned officers, with its benefits to the individual and society, is described. The paper stresses the removal of the responsibility for education and employment of veterans from the state and federal level and placing it on the individual soldier. Through this process, the individual will be better prepared to reenter civilian society.

The Armed Forces' veteran comprises a significant portion of the population of the United States. "There were 28.5 million veterans of both sexes in 1980. They accounted for one person in six (16.9 percent) in the civilian population 16 years of age or older" (Dienstfry & Byrne, 1984, p. 1). This group is increasing daily as new veterans are released from active duty or retire from military service. This ever increasing group of skilled personnel is a vast, and, in some cases, untapped resource for business and industry. They leave military service with a multitude of skills and years of proven performance. It is unfortunate that a good many are forced to take low paying jobs and begin life in the civilian sector totally unprepared for a new career. The state and federal governments provide a multitude of services for veterans upon discharge from active duty. They are well organized and provide the veteran with information on employment and various educational opportunities. The one thing they cannot do is restructure the experience the service member has gained on active duty. These services are performed after the fact. They are an attempt to counsel an individual after he/she has experienced service life. This requires placing the individual in a job without prior planning, and this may be very much like fitting a square peg into a round hole. Employment counseling and preparation should have been done before the individual departed active duty. In the case of retirees, it should have been done between the ninth and the 15th year of service. To date a service member may retire after 20 years of active duty.

Using a holistic programming approach, this paper will develop a

pre-retirement program for Armed Forces' noncommissioned officers. This group is being singled out because of its size and lower position in the military hierarchy. As a group they possess far fewer college degrees and earn far less retirement than retired officers. They comprise the vocational technical end of the military spectrum and include over 134 different military occupational specialties (Military Career Guide, 1985). This group does not have the advantages of being able to attend fully funded degree programs on a "leave of absence" from active duty or of attaining graduate credits for military courses completed. In many ways they are at a disadvantage when returning to the civilian work force. The enlisted member is discharged or retired without the proper planning for a successful civilian career.

In planning for the discharge or retirement from active duty of the enlisted member, many factors must be considered. The Armed Forces contain almost every job description available in civilian life. They also contain many that have no civilian equivalent. These comprise about one third of the total military occupational specialties. All of the enlisted specialties stress qualities that are transferable to the civilian sector. These are leadership, management, innovativeness, the ability to work under pressure, the ability to accomplish the mission at all costs, obedience to proper authority and pride in one's military unit. The enlisted member works long hours at his/her job, and, in most cases, has little time to pursue the educational opportunities available to him/her through the military. This is

especially true in the combat arms. An individual in the combat arms is a specialist in many areas. He/she is considered nonprofessional or paraprofessional by his/her military superiors. Occupying this position, he/she is excluded from many programs that would benefit him/her. For all intensive purposes, he/she is considered a second class citizen. He/she is trained to simply obey orders, and, in many cases, because of this training, he/she is easily intimidated by higher authority. This is designed into the system and is a necessary part of the system, but it also has long term negative effects. The enlisted member is released from active duty with skills that have not been fully developed or have not been fully realized. In most cases, the enlisted member cannot translate these skills into civilian language. Lacking this knowledge and usually not possessing a college degree, the ex-enlisted member is left to fend for him/herself.

The fact remains that most veterans appear to require additional counseling in both the areas of education and employment. The emphasis placed on counseling after the fact is relatively unproductive. The thrust of veterans' counseling should be before the individual becomes a veteran. This may not be possible during a time of war, but there is no excuse in peacetime. In a search of the literature, this author found nothing on the advantages of hiring an ex-enlisted member. One article was discovered extolling the merits of hiring ex-military officers (Townsend, 1984). In all literature received from the Veterans Administration, veterans are considered as one unit. The only distinction made is for male or female veterans. No consideration is given for

officer or enlisted status. This skews any research as the ex-officer is more likely to possess a college degree and, therefore, earn more money than an ex-enlisted member. Officers are required to possess at least a bachelors degree and are highly encouraged to pursue a masters degree. The enlisted member is encouraged to complete an associates degree or a bachelors, but those that do are in the minority. According to the Veterans Administration (1984), the number of veterans that completed four years of college in 1983 was 20.8% (p. 9). This does not account for the number of officer personnel who would have completed their four years of college prior to entering the civilian work force.

The ex-enlisted member enters the civilian work force with a multitude of skills and abilities to find him/herself unprepared for the transition. This translates into millions of dollars spent on education and counseling that could have been saved if counseling had been done at the proper time during the service member's tour of active duty.

The Organizational Elements Model (Sample & Kaufman, 1986) is useful in developing a pre-retirement program for the active duty enlisted member. The Organizational Elements Model attempts to consider all aspects of the program and its effect on society as a whole. Because the service member is part of the military community and will eventually become part of the larger civilian community, all efforts must be made to include not only the impact on military society but the impact on civilian society. This holistic approach is what is

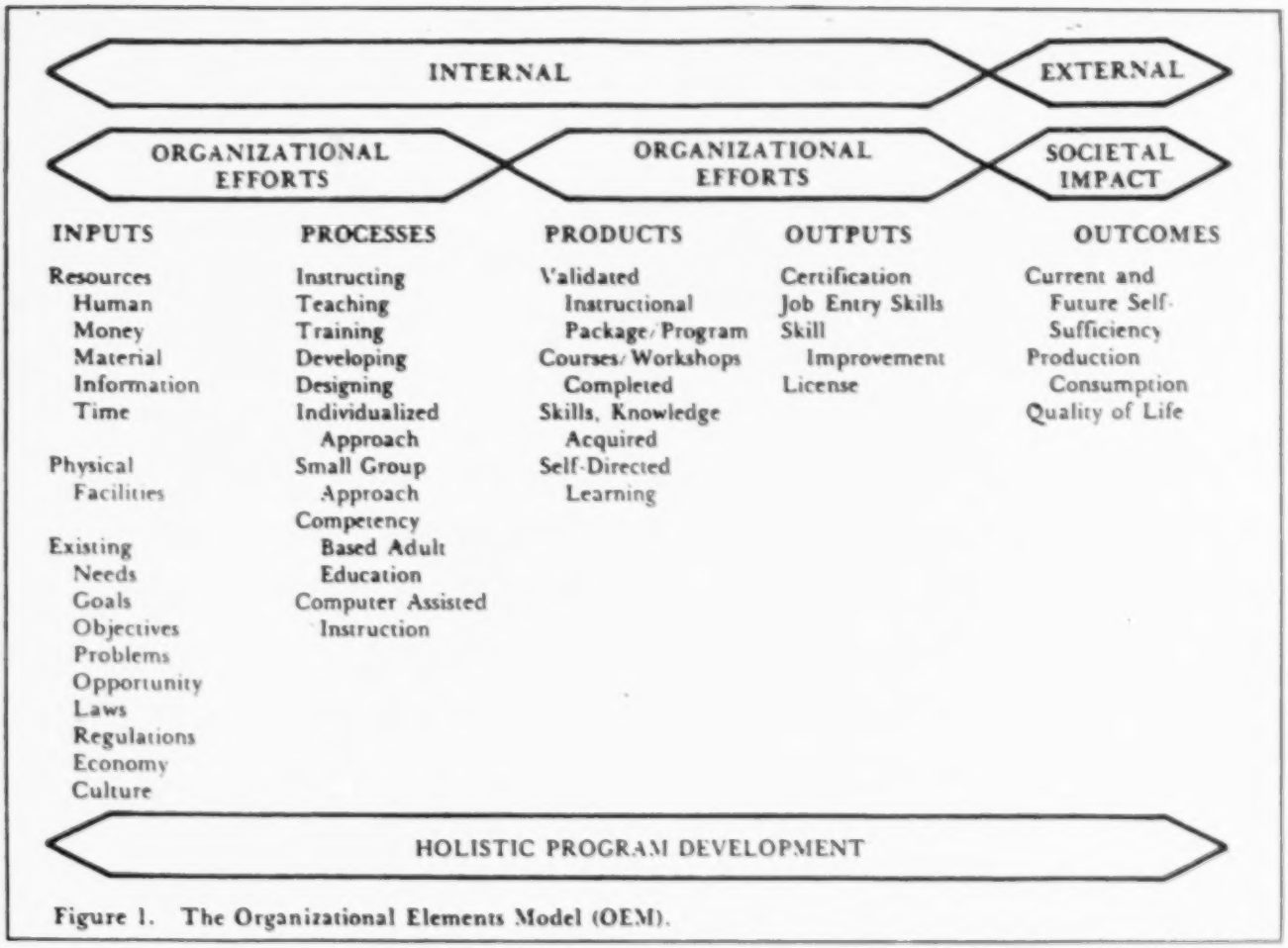

Figure 1. The Organizational Elements Model (OEM).

Source: Sample and Kaufman, 1986, p. 19.

lacking in the military today. To the best of my knowledge, pre-retirement program planning for enlisted personnel does not exist in the Armed Forces. It must be emphasized that the real responsibility for the transition into civilian life for the veteran must be placed on the individual. This program is designed to assist the active duty soldier and provide a plan of action for him/her to follow. The ultimate success or failure of the program will depend on the individual.

The Organizational Elements Model is divided into Internal and External elements. These are subdivided into Organizational Efforts and Societal Impact. Organizational Efforts include Imputs containing resources, physical facilities, existing needs, goals and objectives. The processes will include teaching, training, developing and the small group approach. Products include validated instructional programs, workshops and acquired learning. The Outputs are certification, job entry, improvement skills or licensure. Outcomes are current and future self-sufficiency, production and improved quality of life.

Imputs

Resources such as money, material and human resources are required to implement a pre-retirement program for enlisted service members, and these are already in the military system. The educational services office of the Armed Forces can provide the educational personnel to conduct the program. Time could be allocated out of the normal duty day once or twice a year. The program could consist of a four hour block of instruction for service members reaching the ninth year of

service. It could be made mandatory with a follow-up in the 12th year to assess progress or to clarify career goals. The reason I have chosen the ninth and 12th years is because it is estimated that approximately 10% of enlisted personnel depart the Armed Forces for various reasons between the ninth and 15th year of service. One of the reasons for this may be the lack of clear cut career goals. Another follow-up could be scheduled in the 18th year, and a final one at the retirement briefing which would coincide with the normal exit briefing given to all service members. The physical facilities are already in place as the military has numerous areas already set aside for training on every military post. The existing needs and goals of the individual and of the Armed Forces could be made to coexist through the proper assessing of the mid-careerist's future goals. Any problems that may surface could be resolved with further counseling. The military already has personnel in place for educational counseling. This could be extended to include pre-retirement counseling.

Processes

The instructional method will be developed around a small group approach. This will encourage group interaction and, hopefully, convince the service members that the program is concerned about their future.

Products

The service member will acquire skills in the assessment of his/her current and future goals, and how these can coincide with the

military mission. Emphasis will be placed on degree completion and its application to his/her respective military occupational specialty. Stress will be placed on long range planning for a civilian occupation upon retirement. Consolidation and recognition of current saleable experiences will be discussed with their relation to the civilian marketplace. Emphasis will be placed on the individual achieving specific goals prior to the next mandatory session. Availability of services will be discussed.

Outputs

The service members will receive a certificate of completion for each session attended. This will then be recorded in the service members' educational file.

Outcomes

The program will provide the future veteran with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in the civilian marketplace. He/she will be prepared for the transition into civilian life and be much less dependent on the services provided by the state and federal governments. The veteran will be more aware of his/her potential and how his/her experiences translate into civilian education and employment. The result will be a better informed veteran who will be a greater asset to society and to any organization he/she chooses to enter. Since counseling would have been provided on active duty, the number of veterans requiring these services should decrease. This translates into savings at the Veterans Administration level. Even in time of war, the process would continue to provide a service to

the future veteran. The improvement of the overall quality of life of the veteran and his/her family will increase the already great contribution that veterans have made to our society.

Evaluation of this program should be ongoing. The service members should be surveyed and their reactions to the program assessed. This should be conducted with each class. Material should be continuously updated to provide the service member with the latest information. The overall impact of the program on society would be hard to assess without a study of enlisted members that have been exposed to the system. This could be conducted about 10 years after the program has been in effect and a sufficient number of veterans have been exposed to the system. In essence, one would need to survey the effect on individuals who attended the program and subsequently retired from or left military service.

The overall impact of a pre-retirement program for enlisted members of the Armed Forces of the United States translates into a better informed, better educated and better prepared veteran. The service member returning to civilian life will be less dependent on government services and will possess the skills necessary to enter the civilian work force with a minimum of trauma. The application of the Organizational Elements Model in program planning provides a model to develop programs that consider society. It is directly applicable in the case of military pre-retirement programming for enlisted service members.

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